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# The Oxford Group Movement

*An address by Victoria Booth Demarest,  
delivered in Bellefair United Church,  
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ported.*

AS THIS EVENING, I AM TO SPEAK TO YOU on the Oxford Group Movement, I shall use as basis for my address the text: "Prove all things; hold fast that which is good." (I Thess. 5:21)

There has come upon our world a great change. We find a striking contrast between the past and present centuries in our thinking and outlook. This change has greatly affected religion. The emphasis has shifted—in the past century the emphasis was on theology, in the present one it is on experience; in the past century the emphasis was on theory, now it is on facts; in the past century the emphasis was on instruction, now it is on character; in the past century the emphasis was on origins, in the present one it is on destinies; in the past century the emphasis was on rights, in this century the emphasis is more on our obligations to God and to our fellowmen. In view of this change we of the Church need to solemnly review our beliefs, methods and practice, also to reexamine our standing spiritually. Are we keeping step with the times? are we, as Christians, meeting the need? are we (not the world, but the Church) advancing or retrogressing? It is good for the Church now and then to take a spiritual inventory.

The new religious movement, called The Oxford Group Movement, Buchmanism, or, The First Christian Century Fellowship, is one of the symptoms or evidences of this fundamental change, and, as such, presents the Church with an inescapable challenge.

As ministers of the Gospel it is our duty to preach the truth as we have it in Jesus Christ and in God's Word. To this test we must submit all our opinions, all the changes in our thinking, all our various experiences. We know that truth when perceived, appropriated and applied, will set men free. And so we are after the truth tonight, and only the truth. We are called upon to preach the truth without fear or favor and without regard to the opinions of men. You may not agree with me in all that I say tonight; but I come to you sincerely, seeking to expound to you the truth as I see it in Christ and in His Word, with respect to this our age, and with respect in particular to the Oxford Group Movement.

Before I proceed with my message, I want to call your attention—because the circumstances at the close of the service will not permit me to go into the matter—to the inquiry-room which is on my right and on your left, a little room where we will meet after the service to pray and to seek God's face. Those of you who realize your need of Christ as Saviour, those of you who are troubled, who are in difficulty and perplexity and who desire light and help, are invited to come. You will find what you need on your knees. If I can help you in any way I shall be glad to do so. Also those of you who have failed in your Christian life, who have wandered away, or who are conscious of stumblings in your path, who want to get right with God and to make a new beginning, are invited to meet me in that little room.

We now come to the subject of the evening, The Oxford Group Movement.

There have always been new movements in the history of the Church—they have come and gone. These new movements, even if possessing some undesirable features, have on the whole been a blessing. They bring new light, they emphasize truths that have been neglected; they stir us to new activity in searching the Scriptures; they challenge our conscience; they shake us into awareness; they bring us under the convicting, searching light of the Holy Spirit; they drive

us to our Bibles; thus these movements have been a purifying and renewing force in the life of the Church.

Most of the time these movements are reactions. The Church settles into an extreme and needs to be shaken free that she may swing back to her normal position of balanced truth. For instance, in the carnal, warring days of Oliver Cromwell, the Society of Friends, or Quakers as they were called, came as a breath from Heaven. They reminded the Church that Christianity was a religion of peace and good will. It is true they were extreme in some of their views: they refused to take the oath in court, or to defend themselves or their rights in any way. They were called fanatics. But what a blessing these Quakers were! They emphasized the great truth that we must love our enemies and that warfare is absolutely unchristian. Take another movement, that of the Salvation Army, which came in days when religion was a matter of formality, mostly concerned with "the elect" who already belonged to the Church. The Salvation Army was a tremendous reaction. It placed the emphasis not on creeds, not on forms or ceremonies, or on Church-membership, but on spiritual *life*, on salvation, the salvation of souls.

New movements usually emphasize, as I have already said, neglected truths. There is a movement known in more recent years as the Pentecostal Movement. Some people condemn it utterly—that position is wrong regarding any movement. We have no right to pass sweeping judgment. The Pentecostal Movement with all its weaknesses, extravagances and even errors in teaching, emphasized the great truth of the Holy Spirit and of our utter dependence upon Him. It awakened the Church all over the world to a new consideration of the Third Person of the Trinity and of His power.

Every one of these movements has its own terminology; but why should we stumble over terminology, especially if new terminology puts new life into old truths? There is power in words. The truths remain the same. Terminology, after all, is unimportant—what we are after is *truth*.

Movements in the Church are often messengers of God, and like the angels in the Old Testament, they come in



185

different garbs. Abraham did not always recognize the angels that came to him in the attire of men. In these new movements we must not pay attention to the garb. It is the messenger, not the garb, that matters.

Another word by way of introduction. The Oxford Group Movement started among the educated, the cultured, the wealthy classes. This has caused a great deal of prejudice. Here a word of warning is needed. Experience has shown that snobbishness may be manifested by the poor towards the rich, and by the ignorant towards the educated, even as conversely. I have known certain poor to take the attitude that, because some were educated, cultured or wealthy, they could not be real Christians, even as reversely in the early days of the Salvation Army the cultured and educated thought that drunks, bums, and women of the streets could not be saved. We must beware of prejudice—nothing is more misleading. “God is no respecter of persons.” Why should not a movement start among the so-called upper classes? Instead of allowing this fact about the Oxford Group Movement to prejudice us, should we not rejoice? Some may perhaps have the attitude towards the cultured and rich that the people of Jesus’ day expressed in the words, “Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?” In connection with this, let me say that I have been much interested in the possibilities of the consecrated drama—not what is commonly understood as the sacred drama, but the consecrated drama. A good deal of sacred drama is misleading, because it exploits religion for the glory of art. Consecrated drama gives the glory to God, Who is the Creator of the dramatic gift. A revival recently started among certain of the artists in Chicago. These consecrated their gifts to the service of God. They sometimes interrupt rehearsals for prayer. I have a vision of a church in which artists will have the opportunity to use all their talents to the glory of God in His service. God can speak through the eye as well as through the ear. Well, has not the Church manifested the same attitude towards the artist world: “Can any good come out of the artists?” I repeat, God is no respecter of persons. Our prejudices are

abominable; we are tied to them, hand and foot. The Church needs consecrated art, intellect, talent. God needs His Pauls as well as His Peters. Peter was an uneducated, crude, cursing, swearing fisherman when Jesus called him; Paul, on the other hand, was cultured, refined, and well-trained. Peter and Paul both became great apostles, and the Church is greatly indebted to each.

One more thought by way of introduction. What should the attitude of the Church be towards new movements? It should be, so it seems to me, one of humble open-mindedness. We can always learn. We never exhaust truth. We are only little children and have eternity ahead of us. Yes, our attitude should be one of humble open-mindedness and sympathy—for are we not all members of one Body? It should also be one of gratitude and love, because every new movement, whatever its faults, makes a contribution to the Church, and we need every new contribution.

However, let us not forget that the Church is greater than any part of it. The Church is the Body of Christ, and we should not allow any movement or group of people to receive that degree of loyalty and devotion which rightly belongs to the Church as a whole. Let us recognize those who are our Christian brethren regardless of the movement or group to which they belong. We who are not allied with the Oxford Group Movement must be willing to receive anything our brethren in that Movement have to give to us. On the other hand, those in the Movement must not despise in any way Christians richer in experience than themselves—who belong to the old orders in the Church, who are more deeply taught in the things of God, and are thus able to provide a much-needed balance. If the Oxford Group Movement has the enthusiasm, freshness and zeal of youth, on the other hand older bodies have the experience, wisdom and stability of maturity.

In speaking directly about the Oxford Group Movement I will first deal with its mission to the Church and then with certain dangers in it against which we must guard.

## *Its Mission*

The Oxford Group presents a very much needed challenge to the Church of God. This challenge is expressed in its high standard of "Absolute honesty, absolute purity, absolute unselfishness, and absolute love." Let me speak of the word "absolute", it is worth pondering. It admits no half measures. Is it not another way of expressing what the Lord Jesus said, "Be ye perfect?" Immediately we begin to cringe: it is the old Holiness Movement in another form, and some of us do not like it. "Be ye perfect,"—did Jesus say it or did He not?—"even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect." Would the Lord Jesus have raised such a standard if it were impossible of attainment? "Absolute"—I love that word.

"Absolute honesty"—be honest not only with God but with your fellowmen; absolutely sincere and truthful, honest in all your dealings one with another, on the square, nothing hidden or covered up, nothing underhanded and sneaky, frankly owning to your faults and weaknesses and admitting your failures. What a difference it would make if we Christians accepted this challenge! What advance we would make along the whole front!

"Absolute purity"—not only of acts but of thoughts. Acts are born in our thoughts, therefore Jesus directed His shots at our thoughts: "Whosoever looketh on a woman"—in a way that he should not—"hath committed adultery *in his heart*." Paul also said: "Whosoever hateth his brother *is* a murderer." Purity of heart, thought and life! Did the Lord Jesus not say, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God"?

"Absolute unselfishness," or as the Groups call it, "un-self-ness." Is not that again another way of expressing what the Lord Jesus said: "If any man will come after me, let him deny *himself*." Instead of self ruling, Christ rules. Self is our greatest enemy. All sin has its root in self—all sin—I say without reservation. That is why the secret of victory over sin is in the words of Paul, "I am crucified with Christ; nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me."



"Absolute love," which is simply the Thirteenth of First Corinthians put into practice. That chapter is Christianity in a nutshell. If we lived the Thirteenth of First Corinthians we would not need any Oxford Group Movement, or any other movement. Love "seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; . . . believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things." "Love suffereth long and is kind." "Love shall cover the multitude of sins." "Love is the fulfilling of the law." (The last two quotations are not in the Thirteenth of First Corinthians but are in the Scriptures.) And when all things have passed away, love will abide for ever, for "love never faileth"—that is Christianity. "Absolute honesty, absolute purity, absolute unselfishness, absolute love," this standard presents a much needed challenge, a challenge that causes us to realize once again the truth and beauty of the truly Christian life.

The second contribution which the Oxford Group Movement makes to the Church is in its emphasis on practical Christianity. For many years I have preached the importance of practical Christianity. I do not believe in any Christianity that is not translated into daily conduct, that does not enter into every part of our lives—in the home, in the office, anywhere, in private as well as in public. This emphasis is needed especially in these days in which we have made so much of teaching. Dear friends, I am not saying this critically, but I have been in missions where the Bible was taught and taught, and taught to death; Christianity became a matter of beliefs and not of life; all the wondrous teachings of the Bible became a matter of the mind. The Oxford Group Movement is a call to reality—not profession but reality! And surely that is a call that needs to be made in this day, for the whole world is crying out for reality. It is a call for doctrine to be translated into life; for the Word, which is the truth of God in Christ, to be made flesh in us; for theory to become experience. "Let your light so shine before men," said the Lord Jesus, "that they may *see* your good works," and then they will believe and "glorify your Father which is in heaven." We often hear it said that we must

*first* believe and then we shall see, and the words of Jesus "Believe" and thou shalt "see the glory of God," are continually quoted in support of this contention. *But these words were not said to the ungodly*—Jesus addressed them to a disciple, Martha, who was already a believer. No, Jesus upheld the world in its demand to see before it believed. The world should see "Christ in" us "the hope of glory."

Christianity should be first of all manifested in *conduct*. Whereas the Evangelicals and in fact the Church as a whole have taught that we should know the doctrine *first* and afterwards do His will (hoping we may do it), the Oxford Group Movement is following Christ in teaching: "If any man will *do* His will he shall *know* of the doctrine." In other words obedience *first*—the willingness to do His will, the adjustment of the heart—*afterwards* we will be given the illumination of the mind. Therefore, this emphasis of the Oxford Group Movement on practical Christianity is right. It has often been said, "Practice what you preach," but even more do we need to be able to preach what we practice.

Then another good emphasis, another contribution that the Oxford Group Movement makes is that *it takes no one for granted*. In this it puts its finger on a weakness in the life of the Church. We have made too much perhaps of our evangelists, preachers, bishops, archbishops, and officials. Do not misunderstand me. The Scriptures teach that we should honor our leaders "for their works' sake." I am not saying that we should not honor those who are worthy of honor, but we have had towards those in high positions something of the attitude expressed in the words, "the queen can do no wrong." This has been a source of grave danger. Ministers and evangelists have felt they could get away with things just because of their position. On that account (I say it with tears in my heart) we have had shocking scandals in the Church which have caused many to stumble and to lose their faith. Again I say, "God is no respecter of persons." The attitude of the Oxford Group Movement is that it makes no difference who you are, you must square up with truth. We are all alike in



the sight of God, regardless of how many letters we have after our names. God looks at the heart and at the life, and, if anything, He demands more, not less, of those who occupy prominent places.

Another good thing in the Oxford Group Movement is the elimination of taboos. This may have its dangers but on the whole I think it is helpful. Our Christianity has been choked with taboos. It has been a religion of "Don't—don't—don't." What does it mean to be a Christian? It means that you wont smoke cigarettes, that you wont play cards, that you wont attend the theatre, that you wont do this and that you wont do that! The emphasis has been more on the negative than on the positive. I do not see this attitude or teaching in the Gospels, and I have searched them earnestly for years; nor do I see them in the Epistles. There the emphasis is always on the positive: "Love your enemies," "Let your light shine," "Christ in you, the hope of glory." Oh, what a pity, we have lost so much by not putting the emphasis where it belongs. We have been legalists, we have made Christianity a matter of the "don'ts" of the law rather than of the spirit. If Christ dwells in you, all other things will take care of themselves. If He is supreme in your heart and life, everything else will naturally fall in its proper place. Christ Himself is the demarcation line. "I have never been to a theatre in my life," someone says righteously. But what about your temper? What about your jealousy? What about your criticizing spirit? What about your self-righteousness? Perhaps some who go to the theatre are nearer manifesting Jesus in their hearts and lives. You condemn some girl severely because she smokes cigarettes (by the way there is no spiritual or moral difference between a woman and a man smoking) but after all smoking cigarettes is a harmful self-indulgence, not actually a sin, whereas we know that to refuse to forgive our brother is a sin. If you have Christ dwelling in your heart you will want your body to be clean and you will drop the cigarettes of your own accord. Let us put first things first. We have put the emphasis where it

does not belong—on external things, *when God is all the time looking at the heart*. For this reason I think that the elimination of taboos is fine. We must get down to basic, fundamental things.

Another contribution made by the Oxford Group Movement is its stressing of the importance of the "Quiet times." Ah, how much that is needed. Who has not been guilty of the neglect of a "quiet time" with God the first thing in the morning. Long before I knew of the Oxford Group Movement I have been preaching that in prayer it is far more important to listen to what God has to say to you than to do all the talking yourself. Get your orders first thing in the morning from your Divine Captain, for are you not "a good soldier of Jesus Christ"? The quiet time has been a neglected source of power. We need to have our hearts divinely attuned every morning that we may keep right with God. William Booth, my grandfather, when he greeted his officers for Councils of War, would take their hands and looking searchingly into their faces with those steely eyes of his, would say, "Are you well saved, Commissioner?" Note the present tense—*now*, not yesterday! That would take the Commissioner down a few degrees: "Are you well saved, Commissioner?" Salvation is an every-day salvation. We were saved from the guilt and penalty of sin at the time of conversion, but *every day* we need to be saved from the power of sin. This gives great importance to the "quiet time."

Another contribution which the members of the Oxford Group Movement make to the Church as a whole is that which they call "sharing."

Now, before I proceed with this question of "sharing", I want to divide it into "sharing" along positive lines and "sharing" along negative lines. I will confine myself for the present to the first. In this sense sharing is simply another way of witnessing. Jesus said: "Ye shall be witnesses unto me . . . . unto the uttermost part of the earth." We lose a great deal when we do not share with each other continually, not only what Jesus has done for us in the past but what He is doing for us every day: "He gave me victory this morning,"

"He helped me to overcome my temper," "He gave me grace to forgive that faithless friend." Such sharing is constructive and cannot help but result in changing lives. There is nothing like the word of our testimony. In the book of Revelation we read: "They overcame him (the devil) by the blood of the Lamb, and by *the word of their testimony*." These two—the blood of the Lamb and the word of our testimony—are the secrets of victory. I am whole-heartedly in accord with that kind of sharing. Hallelujah! we need more of it.

In the children's meetings, when I have had as many as two thousand children alone—children between the ages of seven and fourteen—we have had marvelous altar services. The dear little things do not come forward "en masse" but one by one. I ensure their not coming like sheep by having them keep their eyes shut and heads bowed during the appeal. Then when I give the invitation they get up from their seats with their heads still bowed and make their way to the altar. There they pray audibly, and you should hear their prayers! Every sin in embryo has been confessed in these children's meetings. When they are at the altar, sobbing, confessing, getting right with God, I have said to them, "If there is a boy or girl in this audience against whom you have sinned, get up and go and put it right with that one, because Jesus said, 'If thou bring thy gift to the altar and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; *first* be reconciled to thy brother, and *then* come and offer thy gift!'" I have seen children get up and look around until they found the boy or girl they were seeking, then they have gone and whispered something into his or her ear, and the first thing I knew the little boy or girl to whom the confession was made would come with the confessor back to the altar. Often have I wished that it were possible to deal with adults in the same way. We need the simplicity and obedience of little children. This kind of "sharing"—witnessing, confessing, putting things right one with another—is much needed.



On New Year's Eve, at home with the children, we have made a practice of having a pad and pencil and on our knees writing down the besetting sins and faults of the old year of which we were convicted. Then we have had a "getting right with one another" meeting. I have seen our little boy or girl going to the governess or to the cook and whispering in her ear, and after a while one or the other would come to their father or to me. Sacred transactions! This spiritual adjustment often repeated would keep one up to the minute. Besides, it gives to the world a concrete evidence that Christianity works. The man of the world exclaims, "How do I know that Jesus Christ is the Saviour? You say the Bible says so—but how do I know? I want to see proof." The attitude of the world is a "show me" one, and Jesus justifies the world in that attitude. The Lord Jesus says, "Yes, show them." How can you show them? By being able to say, "I know because He has saved me from this and that sin." Concrete evidence in a life of what Jesus can do convinces more quickly than books or sermons.

We also "share" by lovingly pointing out one another's weaknesses and failings. The Apostle Paul tells us, "If a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness." If we cannot receive constructive criticism, suggestions, or even reproofs one from the other, we are poor Christians indeed. In my experience this is the greatest test of the reality of our Christianity. How many fail right here—they refuse to receive reproof in the spirit of humility. As one of the leaders of the Oxford Group Movement expressed it, "When we are near self-justification we are nowhere near repentance."

Still another contribution I think the Oxford Movement has made is also an old truth with a new name, the contribution of "Guidance." This is nothing more than walking in the light as a child of the light. (Eph. 5:8 and I John 1:7.) If you do not walk in the light you will stumble. We need light not only when first convicted and converted, but every day. And we need to walk in *obedience to that light*, or our light will be turned into darkness. He gives us more

light as we follow the light we already have. "Guidance" is simply walking "in the light as He is in the light." Christ is the light and the Holy Spirit will guide us into all truth. The light will show us what we must do during the day—it will point out the will of God to us and our duty to our fellowmen: and why not write down the "guidance", the new light and knowledge we receive in the morning watch!

I think you will agree with me that we should praise God for these practical and definite contributions that the Oxford Group Movement makes to the whole Church—a refreshing of old truth, a much-needed emphasis, a heart-searching that we all need along practical lines.

### ***Its Dangers***

Let us now consider certain dangers in the Movement, dangers against which we must guard. But before I proceed further with my subject, let me say that I have had a good deal of experience with the Oxford Group Movement, both directly and indirectly: directly, because I attended a number of their meetings both large and small, and because many of my dear friends are active in the Movement; indirectly, through some of my own spiritual children who have been especially affected by the Movement, and through reading its own literature and books or pamphlets for or against it. It is fair that we know as much as possible about both sides of a question before passing judgment. We are bidden in the Scripture to "prove all things." Especially is this important in these days of confusion in the religious world, days that are very serious for the Church of Christ. Therefore, I want to assure you that anything I say tonight is not said superficially, thoughtlessly, or critically. I have given this matter thought and prayer, and it is only out of a sincere desire to help that I speak on this subject.

One of the dangers in the Oxford Group Movement against which I would warn you is the danger of legalism. Let me explain. In this Christian dispensation we are under

grace, not under law. The danger of legalism was emphasized by the Apostle Paul time and again in his epistles to the early Church. The Church at that time was simply honey-combed with legalists, and Paul had to fight them continually lest they bring the early Christians into bondage. Again and again we hear him say in one way or another: "Stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage." The importance of treasuring our Christian liberty cannot be exaggerated.

Legalism has marred many of God's choicest Movements. Legalism is a "must" that creeps in which *is not of God's creating*. Take the Pentecostal Movement as an illustration. In its early days that Movement did not teach "You must speak in tongues as the evidence that you are baptized with the Holy Spirit." Honor was given to all the gifts of the Spirit. That "must" crept in later, and that "must", which is not Scriptural, caused all the trouble. Those who are under the law regarding "tongues" or anything else, come under condemnation: they torture themselves, they come under the dominion of others, they see through another's eyes, they read their Bibles with another's understanding—they are in bondage, and all bondage is of the Devil.

Naturally we judge a movement by what we know of it; and, understand me, all Groups in the Oxford Group Movement are not alike. In some Groups legalism has crept in far more than in others; but the "must" is undeniably in the Oxford Group Movement as a whole—the "must" with regard to "sharing" and with regard to "guidance."

Let me first speak of the "must" with regard to "sharing." I said earlier in my address that I believed in the positive side of sharing, which is witnessing or exhortation: but the danger is in the negative side of sharing which is confession of sin. Our appeal is always to the Word of God. What does the Word of God say about it? We are told positively that to obtain forgiveness we *must* confess our sins to God: "If we confess our sins (to God), He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteous-



ness." Confession in this respect is simply an evidence of repentance; and without repentance we cannot be forgiven or re-born. The Word of God also states plainly that we *must* confess our sins to those against whom we have sinned. This is doing "works meet for repentance," making restitution or reparation, conforming acts to feeling, practice to profession, translating into conduct what we say we believe. Again I would quote those words of Jesus, "If thou bring thy gift to the altar and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; *first* be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift." As to any other kind of confessing we are left absolutely free to follow the Spirit, and a "thou shalt confess" is unscriptural. *It is not right for any movement, group, or individual to say "you shall confess," or "share," as a condition of being forgiven, saved, or "changed."* The only Scriptural conditions for salvation, re-birth or "change" (as the experience is called by the Oxford Group Movement) are *repentance* and *faith* in the Lord Jesus Christ. To add any other condition is error of the gravest kind. On the other hand, it is not right for the enemies of the Oxford Group Movement to say "you shall *not* confess or share." I repeat, we are absolutely free when it comes to any kind of confession except to God and to those against whom we have sinned. (I do not mean, of course, confession of Christ—this would come under witnessing.)

To bring pressure to bear (I cannot emphasize this too strongly)—to bring pressure to bear on anyone to confess his sins to us is legalism of the worst kind. We are bringing others into bondage. This opens wide the door to all sorts of evils and abuses, to the glorifying of self and to spiritual pride on the part of the one hearing the confession, and to unwholesome rehearsing of sin on the part of the one confessing. It is true that the beginnings of all revivals have been marked by a general confessing of sin and by the making of reparation and restitution on the part of Christians; but this has come *perfectly naturally* without pressure, as a normal result of the work of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of men.

Confession of sin should be left entirely to the leading of the Holy Spirit and to the free will of the one confessing. As to the personal "sharing" on the part of Christians of our victories and defeats, that we may learn thereby, it would seem to me that the Scriptures clearly indicate that this is in order and helpful. "Confess your faults one to another that ye may be healed." But surely we can do this without going into *detail* as to our more serious failures and sins, which, if repented of, are forgiven and, according to God's Word, are "no more." An opening up on the part of Christians in general terms and an acknowledgement of their weaknesses, their failures, their lack of boldness and consecration, etc., is a normal basis for a revival and will also accompany any growth in the Christian life.

Confession of sin is very helpful in some cases, bringing marvelous relief, and even saving people from going insane. It is a means of unburdening the heart, of removing hindrances that stand between the soul and God, and of opening the way for the seeker to accept the atoning work of Christ on the Cross. No one can know the value of confession as well as one who has been privileged to help a large number to find Christ. But the abuses of the Confessional in the Roman Catholic Church are a warning that makes one shudder. Anyone who brings pressure on a soul to confess is committing a grave wrong against that soul. Leaders in the Oxford Group Movement make confession, which they call "sharing," a rigid condition of fellowship with them and question anyone's salvation who does not do it. This is undoubtedly legalism. If of its own accord a soul lays itself bare before us, it is a different matter. At such a time we are on holy ground. What an honor is conferred upon us! Let us take the shoes from off our feet and step softly before God in such a moment, and let us be careful that we fulfill our trust by pointing that soul away from ourselves, away from its sin to the "Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world."

May I remind you of the words of the Apostle Paul: "For though ye have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet

have ye not many fathers: for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel." Few there are who are "fathers" or "mothers" in the gospel, spiritually matured and absolutely trustworthy. There is a great difference between confessing to *anyone* and confessing to those who are proved and tested spiritual fathers and mothers. Without mentioning names, confessions have been repeated which have led to the betrayal of confidence, and many have been driven away from God because of such betrayal! That is why confession to man, unless in connection with reparation or restitution, should not be encouraged. When God forgives, He forgets; our sins are blotted out, cast into the depths of the sea, remembered against us no more for ever—but it is not always so with man.

Sin is corruption—it rots, it stinks. This is plain language, but it is the truth. The only place for sin, therefore, is in the grave. It should be buried as quickly as possible, buried out of sight under the precious blood of Christ, and it should be left there. Do not think about it any more, it is forgiven, it is *no more*.

I shall never forget one occasion when as a young girl I was torturing and condemning myself, agonizing and groveling in the dust because of my backsliding. My dear brother, who was praying with me, suddenly said: "Vicky, stop that!" I looked up at him shocked. He continued, "Do you know what you are doing?" And then he said something which was very crude but which nevertheless did me a world of good. He said, "Vicky, you are removing the precious Blood of Christ from your sin; you are taking it up and looking at it; you are making the sacrifice of Christ of no avail. Your sins have been forgiven and put under the Blood, leave them there!" Yes, let our "sharing" be on the positive side. We do not want to think of corruption and vileness. "Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, *think on these things.*" There are shameful sins and it is not wholesome



or good to discuss them, especially in the presence of others as has been done in "group" meetings. The less we talk about them the better. Paul says there are things which it is a shame even to mention, and which should not once be named among Christians. To lay bare the inner workings of corruption and of the vileness of sin in the presence of others is like undressing in public, and any encouragement of this by the Oxford Group Movement should be reprov'd. Fellowship should never be on the basis of sin: there is no true fellowship except on the basis of Christ—the fellowship of the saints.

Also it is dangerously easy for the adherents of the Oxford Group Movement to form the confession habit. This habit induces a mental objectivity and consequent irresponsibility towards sin, and tends to destroy moral sensibility.

In summing up, let me say that "positive sharing" or witnessing is our glorious duty and privilege. This kind of sharing we should do, especially with the unconverted and the babes in Christ. One splendid characteristic of the Oxford Group Movement is that however little their members may have in the way of knowledge, light, or experience, it is *real* to them and *they pass it on*. Thus it is increased—they have put into practice that we are saved to serve, called to be sent, that the moment we are converted we are to become "fishers of men," or "life-changers," as they call themselves. Some stumble at the way they express themselves, but is it not better to have the real thing even if not expressed in orthodox terms than to have correct terminology without the experience? Besides, we evangelists often have to put the right words into the mouths of our converts; we cannot expect a babe to know how to talk. But as to "negative sharing" or confession of sin: apart from confession to God and those sinned against, if it is made at all it should be made only to our spiritual equals or superiors, to "fathers" and "mothers" in the gospel—those who have proved themselves to be selfless and trustworthy, and who have had experience in the things of God. There should always be

mutuality and a spirit of genuine humility in such "sharing": this will avoid giving another power over our lives. The assumption of power over another is a dreadful evil.

The other danger in the Oxford Group Movement is legalism in "guidance." This is manifested first in bringing every little act of our lives under bondage to direct, so-called, "leadings," and second in laying our hands on other's lives.

With regard to the first manifestation of legalism in guidance, Catherine Booth used to say, "God expects us to use our sanctified reason and common sense." To claim divine guidance for every trivial, little matter of daily life savors of presumption if not blasphemy, and provokes the ridicule of unbelievers, thus bringing disrepute upon our profession.

As to the second manifestation of legalism in guidance, I have always had a holy horror of it. This laying our hands on other people's lives is a danger which has crept not only into the Oxford Group Movement but which we find in the history of the Church down the years. It has been much in evidence in the Pentecostal Movement, only their terminology is different. They say, "I have the word of the Lord that you should do thus and so"; or, "God has revealed to me that you are guilty of thus and so"; or, "The Lord has told me to write to you that you have this and that and the other sin, and that you must confess." I received a letter of that nature under the cloak of "guidance to share", but the letter was founded on a complete misapprehension and was simply the result of gossip. In another letter I was told that the writer had "guidance" that I should give up the Lord's work and that my husband, who is also preaching, should go back into business. It is dangerous to put our hands on the lives of others. We may humbly make a suggestion, but to make positive pronouncements concerning another's course of action in the name of "guidance" is overstepping our privileges, and often results in a kind of "spiritual hold-up" or even in "spiritual blackmail." We who are Christians must be very careful to walk in humility regarding "guidance." Guidance when it concerns our own lives is one thing—and how we need the true guidance of God's Spirit and

of His Word!—But “guidance” with regard to other’s lives is a very different matter. I am thankful to say, in justice to the Oxford Movement, that its members emphasize checking up one’s guidance. This cannot be too well emphasized.

Again with regard to legalism in “guidance,” sometimes, when individual pressure fails, collective pressure is brought to bear on a person. This is even more dangerous.

On one occasion some years ago (not in the Oxford Group Movement but in another religious movement) collective pressure was brought to bear on me to make a confession in a meeting. I had been very greatly blessed and brought to search my heart anew; and I made this confession in good faith with tears streaming down my face. Afterwards I found that all I had said had been taken down, comments had been added, other people’s coloring given to my statements, and they were published unknown to me in a paper for private circulation. I never opened my mouth about it, I did not feel free to do so. I had to leave it with God. But it was a cause of stumbling to some of my own spiritual children. The Devil can use something you say or do with the best intentions because the pressure of others’ supposed “guidance” has been brought to bear upon you. Let us heed Paul’s injunction: “Stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ has made us free.” Let us love one another, learn from one another, sit at one another’s feet; but let us always respect one another’s individuality and freedom in the Lord. Do not bring pressure one upon another. Let God lead us. He may lead one into the Oxford Group Movement, He may lead another out of it; He may lead one into the Anglican Church and another into the Salvation Army; He may lead one into a fuller understanding of a certain truth, He may lead another into preaching a much neglected doctrine. The children of God are led by the Spirit of God, and thus the whole body of Christ comes into the full-orbed knowledge of the truth and is edified.

Another weakness in the Oxford Group Movement is a lack of sufficient instruction in doctrine. That this lack is a reaction is very evident. We have had so much teaching



(as I said at the beginning of my address) which has not been translated into life; but we must remember that every reaction may go to the other extreme. Paul emphasized that we must be built up in our holy faith; that we must be established upon a sure foundation. Experience, feelings, emotions—these, if alone, constitute a foundation of sand. There is need of sound doctrine in these days that believers may be established, that they may know how to “give an answer to every man that asketh” them “a reason of the hope that is in” them.

It should be lovingly pointed out that adherents of the Group Movement speak much of God but little of Christ; they speak much of being “changed,” but perhaps not enough regarding the One Who changes them; they speak much of sin, but not enough regarding its remedy—the Cross. There is also a great danger that they may give to the Group the glory which belongs to God alone. The strong side of the Movement is in its emphasis upon the “fruit”; its weakness is in the neglect of teaching with regard to the “root.” Another illustration comes to mind. In the Scriptures the Church is likened to a body, the Body of Christ. Now, in the body there are the skeleton and the flesh. Doctrine might be likened to the skeleton, strong, unchanging; experiences, feelings, emotions, are like the flesh with its warmth—the sparkle of the eye, the glory of the hair and complexion. The skeleton without the flesh is nothing but a lot of dry bones, dead—so is doctrine without experience, or the letter without the Spirit. The Apostle James tells us that faith without works is dead. On the other hand, how about the flesh without the skeleton? Emotional experiences which do not have their source in the teachings of the Word of God may be spurious. All so-called religious emotions do not come from God. Many false religions have emotions, joys, ecstasies. There is need in the body for both the skeleton and the flesh: the warmth, the loveliness of experience, but also the solid, upholding of doctrine. Without the skeleton the whole body collapses. Attendance upon some of

the Oxford Group Movement meetings led me to feel that the emphasis on personal experience needed to be balanced with the teaching of *fundamental scriptural truth*.

My concluding remark is that sweeping condemnation of any movement is wrong. I hate—pardon the strong word—I hate to hear people say about a movement within the Church, “It is all of the Devil—have nothing to do with it.” They said that about the Pentecostal Movement, especially during its early days; but with all its extravagances and doctrinal errors concerning tongues, I know some saints of God in the Pentecostal Movement. On the other hand, a sweeping glorification of any movement is also wrong, and unscriptural. “Neither is he that planteth anything, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase.” In all things may Christ, not the Groups, have the preeminence. We should always keep open eyes and open ears. Let us rejoice in all that is good, let us receive it with open arms; but let us ever be on our guard against error because there is only *One* Who can lead us into all truth, and He is the Holy Spirit. The best human beings may make mistakes. In the Scriptures we are warned that the wheat and the tares shall grow together until the harvest. There is no exception to that. There are wheat and tares in every church and in every movement. You cannot, neither can I, separate them. Therefore, it is wrong for us to unhesitatingly condemn or glorify a movement, because there is nothing perfect on earth. The tares are everywhere, but it is a cause for thankfulness that it is not your business and mine to seek them out. If it were, we should make tragic mistakes. We might throw out as tares some of the best saints. I would remind you of another scripture: “Who art thou that judgest another man’s servant? To his own master he standeth or falleth”—not to this one or to that one’s opinion, but “to his *own master* he standeth or falleth. Yea, he shall be holden up; for God is able to make him stand.” So let us not judge one another. Let us love one another, let us warn one another, and strengthen one another’s hands in God. Let us thank God

for the contributions the Oxford Group Movement is making to the whole Church of Christ, and let us learn what we may learn from its ministry and mistakes.

Let us bow our heads:

Lord Jesus, Thou Who art the Light of the World, and the Saviour of men, we draw near to Thee, confessing our weaknesses, our sins, how far short we have fallen of the glory of God. We pray that tonight the Spirit of God may have the victory in every heart. Help us to humble ourselves before Thee. Help us to search our hearts. Help us to confess to Thee wherein we have failed, and to seek Thee on our faces. Help us to put away from us every criticizing, judging, proud, haughty spirit, and all spiritual pride. Help us to learn of Thee, for Thou art meek and lowly in heart, and we shall find rest unto our souls.

We pray for those in this audience who know Thee not. Blessed Saviour of men, draw them to Thyself by Thy Spirit, and may they seek Thee tonight, confess their sins to Thee, and get right with God. Lord give us a great ingathering of souls. May many come down to the little room to seek Thee. O Lord, may we have wonderful victory in Thy presence, at Thy feet. We ask it in Thy dear, blessed name. Amen.



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